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The
ORTH LONDON
PULPIT

*A Special Series
of Sermons delivered at the
ORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE.*

Nº 16

Our Provincial Brethren

A SERMON
PREACHED BY THE

Very Rev. Dr Herman Adler
CHIEF RABBI.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה

July 13th 5661-1901.

Printed for the Wardens of the North London Synagogue,
FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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טובה רוחבו

With the
Wardens' Compliments
and
Best wishes for a
Happy New Year.

OUR PROVINCIAL BRETHREN.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

NORTH LONDON SYNAGOGUE

ON

ש"ק פ' מטוח ומטשי

SABBATH, JULY 13th, 5661—1901.

BY THE

THE CHIEF RABBI.

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1901.

OUR PROVINCIAL BRETHREN.

וְעַבְדֵּיךְ יַעֲבֹרְוּ כֹּל הַלְוִין צָבָא לִפְנֵי
יְיָ לִמְלָחָמָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָדָנִי דָּבָר.

“But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, as my lord saith.—*Numbers xxxii 27.*

MY DEAR BRETHREN,—It is recorded of Samuel, the faithful leader of his people, that “he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all these places.”* This statement is of considerable archæological interest and value, as it constitutes, I believe, the first record in history of that wise arrangement, which has worked so beneficially in this realm—the appointment of Justices in Eyre—*i.e.*, itinerant judges,—an institution from which have sprung the Assizes held periodically in each county for the purpose of administering civil and criminal justice.

I endeavour humbly to follow the example of the illustrious prophet, and go from year to year “in circuit” to the several communities under my pastoral charge. And the subjects which primarily engage my attention on the occasion of these visits are those

**I Samuel, vii., 16.*

indicated by the names of the towns visited by Samuel,—**בֵּית אֱלֹהִים** the house of God, **המִצְפָּה** the watch-tower—the school-house of the community, and **הַגָּלָל**—the circle,—its social relations. I have been recently engaged upon such a tour of inspection, and am anxious to communicate to you some of the impressions which these visits make upon me.

THE METROPOLIS AND THE PROVINCES.

I deem it advisable to do so, for there are too many in our midst, whose mental horizon, nay whose sympathies seem to be bounded by the Metropolitan area. We hear complaints made at public meetings of our charitable societies, usually with low murmurings, but, at times, with loud disapproval, that our brethren in the provinces afford too scant an aid in maintaining institutions, the benefits of which they are readily admitted to share. And I again have often to listen to angry reproaches, that the London Jewry does not come forward with sufficient alacrity to the help of poor, struggling congregations in the country. There is of course grave injustice in sweeping charges such as these. But the fact, I think, must be admitted, that the average Jew of the Metropolis pays but scant heed to Provincial Judaism, unless he be startled by hearing of an impending suit in a court of

law, or by reading a sensational, exaggerated statement in the sober Ecclesiastical Intelligence of *The Times*, such as that which magnified some unruliness at the choice of an official into “disorderly scenes at the election of a Rabbi.” I would speak to you to-day of Provincial Judaism, its claims and titles to our active sympathy.

BIRMINGHAM.

Now, it would of course be altogether absurd and preposterous to comprehend into one group all congregations outside the Metropolis. The community in the capital of the Midlands needs neither sympathy, advice, nor financial help. London could learn much from Birmingham. Although numbering a Jewish population of nearly five thousand souls, it constitutes one undivided congregation. It has, I believe, undertaken to subsidize a Beth Hamedrash for the benefit primarily of the foreign section of the community. By the help of a munificent legacy, it is erecting an Infant School, such as we need, but have hitherto failed to establish, in connexion with our Westminster Jews’ Free School.

MANCHESTER

In Manchester we encounter all the difficulties and anxieties that confront us here in the East and the West. But happily that community possesses

men and women, though by no means in sufficient numbers, who are eager and able to cope with those difficulties. Synagogues are springing up in every quarter of the City. Some degree of union has been effected in dealing with the religious, educational and charitable needs of that community. The residents are happily able to work out their own salvation. And this description applies also to the prosperous congregations of Liverpool and Glasgow. In the latter city a United Synagogue has been established, amalgamating the places of worship of every section of the community.

LEEDS.

But matters wear an entirely different aspect when we come, to a city like Leeds. The number of our brethren residing there is, it is computed, not less than 15,000. The condition of the community is almost identical with that of the London Jewry about one hundred years ago, ere a United Synagogue was contemplated, when there was not even a treaty or compact between the three then existing "German" Congregations. Besides the Great Synagogue, there are three places of worship, and a Beth Hamedrash. Every effort to bring about concerted action, with the view of communal duties, religious, educational and charitable, being discharged in

common, have hitherto failed, despite the untiring labours of the local Minister. As the bulk of the members are working men in humble circumstances, the cost of maintaining their places of worship, and of supporting the Rabbis whom they separately appoint, weighs heavily upon them, and has become the cause of much regrettable strife.

In Hull and in Sheffield we have to deplore the same absence of harmony. As a result, Hull with a population of 2,000 is still without a suitable Synagogue. It possesses an efficient girls' but no boys' school. The provision for religious instruction in Sheffield is, for the same reason, entirely inadequate.

OTHER CONGREGATIONS.

Now I gladly record the fact that there are a number of smaller congregations, the spiritual condition of which presents a gratifying contrast. Not wishing to weary you with a full list, I would only instance such towns as Brighton and Bristol, Middlesbro' and Newport, Nottingham and Swansea. Each of these congregations possesses a well-appointed Synagogue, a cultivated Minister, with due provision for the religious training of the young. But there are a number of smaller communities that lack everything that is needed to engender and to maintain in the hearts of young and old, love and attachment to their

ancestral faith. Services are held in localities that are entirely unsuitable ; the access to the place of worship in Stockton-on-Tees is by a ladder-like staircase, almost perilous. Words of spiritual counsel are but rarely heard. And when tidings reach us of such congregations it may be unhappily, in connection with some deplorable difference, "a controversy not in the name of Heaven."

FOREIGNERS, YET BRETHREN.

Some of you may probably plead, We admit this unfortunate state of the case, but it should be borne in mind that the men guilty of such proceedings are not Englishmen, but foreigners. Let me ask you, Are they on that account any the less our brethren ? In chronicling the doings of an Israelite, do our fellow-citizens draw a distinction between one native born and a stranger ? Are we justified in indulging a sneer at the expense of the Russian or Polish immigrant ? What would have become of several of the country Kehilloth without these immigrants, sometimes poor and uncultured, but with few exceptions, ardent in their faith and ready to incur privations and to make sacrifices in upholding it.

It is alleged that foreign members are over-fond of quarrelling about petty affairs. Is not this a racial

failing dating from the days of our sojourn in Egypt ? When Moses went forth to look upon the burdens of his brethren, we are told, " behold two men of the Hebrews strove together."* And this failing has been fostered rather than repressed by the degradation and persecution the Israelite had to endure during many centuries and in many lands, when Kehilla politics became his only amusement and distraction. But we know that this unlovely disposition makes " for our shame among our enemies."

"WHAT IS IT TO ME?"

Dare we then fold our hands and say, We cannot help this ? We have sufficient to do here in London ; we cannot trouble ourselves about the country. An ancient legend relates, that a sage once saw Elijah the prophet in a vision, and enquired of him as to the cause which had led to the destruction of the holy temple. And the prophet rejoined, " What is it to me ?" And when the sage awoke at early morn he was greatly perturbed, and asked himself, Could these words have been spoken by the godly man whose heart was enkindled with fiery enthusiasm for his God and his people ? And the Rabbi bethought himself, and

the true meaning of the reply flashed upon him. These words, "What is it to me?" this base selfishness, this haughty aloofness had compassed the downfall of the nation.

OUR DUTY TO OUR PROVINCIAL BRETHREN.

This is not the attitude which the word of God approves. We read in to-day's Sedra, that when the sons of Reuben and Gad pleaded, that solicitude for their children and the care of their multitudinous flocks and herds would not permit them to join their brethren in the imperding campaign, Moses warmly remonstrated with them, saying: "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?"* so that, stung to the quick by this reproach, they resolved.

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 "And thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle, as my lord saith."

What then is our duty to our brethren outside the Metropolitan area? The worthy Minister of the Birmingham Congregation, in an article on Provincial Judaism, contributed to¹⁴ the Jubilee Number of the

“Jewish Chronicle,”* laments the fact that the country congregations stand apart, each solitary and alone. He proceeds to ask, “How long shall this isolation continue? Look at the great Dissenting bodies in this country with their admirable organization, their close union, their annual conferences, their great common funds for great common objects, ministerial activity, educational work, missionary effort. While the Jewish body only, consists of fractions, each struggling as best it may.” And he asks, why the United Synagogue, instead of embracing twelve Metropolitan Congregations, should not, with a more elastic constitution, include every congregation in the British Empire. This is an ideal, which, I fear, is at present unattainable. But there are capable men in our midst who would desire such closer union accomplished by means of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, a body, the constitution of which provides for the representation of every community in the British Empire.

THE PROVINCIAL MINISTERS’ FUND.

There is, however, one organization, which, if its scope were widened and enlarged, might fitly undertake this task. The Provincial Ministers’ Fund has been founded to assist the smaller country Congregations

*November 13, 1891..

in providing a sufficient income for their Ministers. Considering the small means at the disposal of the Committee, not more than £500 a year, it has proved itself a powerful instrument for good. It enables less prosperous congregations to obtain the services of cultured Ministers, and sends them forth to preach and teach periodically in the smallest and poorest communities. But it needs ampler means so as to render its work more systematic and comprehensive.

EXTENSION OF ITS WORK

I would suggest that the existing Committee be strengthened by inviting representatives from the provinces to take part in its deliberations. It is ardently to be desired that this body should charge itself with greater powers and wider responsibilities. It should inquire into the needs of the various communities that invoke its help. It should afford counsel, smooth differences and give practical help in establishing and maintaining the necessary religious, educational and charitable institutions. I am well aware that the carrying into effect of this project needs the utmost caution, if we are to stimulate, and not to enfeeble, local effort. But we happily possess men in our midst able to cope with the complex problems which this question presents.

THE PROPOSED CONFERENCE OF WOMEN.

Meanwhile I gladly welcome every step by which some union may be brought about between the Metropolis and the country. I am glad to hear that our London sisters intend inviting lady representatives of each community in the United Kingdom to confer with them in the spring of next year. The questions that will engage them, I believe, are mainly in connexion with social work, the more efficient care of the poor and neglected, the training of the young and kindred questions. When our women thus claim their rightful share in the service of humanity we may apply to them the Divine approval recorded in the section recently read, "The daughters of Zolophehad speak aright."*

NO DULL APATHY.

Aye, my brothers and sisters, if the house of Israel is to occupy its rightful position before the world, if prejudices are to be uprooted and slander silenced, there must be no dull apathy, no frosty indifference, no craven isolation. There must be a union of hands and hearts. Each one of us must cheerfully bear his burden of work, saying "And thy servant will pass over, every man armed for war, before the Lord to battle." And the Lord in His mercy will bless and crown with success every honest effort put forth in His name and in His cause. Amen.

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